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Our TV screens have been filled with lots of images of the extremes on the issue of illegal immigration. On one side are those who would have no border controls and allow anyone to come here and claim all the rights of citizenship on whatever basis they choose (including terrorists). On the other side are some people who are against all immigration, legal or otherwise.

Once we reject those ideas from the fringes, I think there are a few tenets of the immigration issue that can be embraced by the vast majority of rational-thinking individuals in the middle. These tenets are not a complete solution. But they are a guide to where a solution can be found:

The status quo is unacceptable: The reason that this is such a big issue is because no one is happy with what we are doing now. Whether you are an illegal immigrant working and trying to avoid capture or someone unsuccessfully trying to come here legally or a person watching your tax dollars go to fund benefits for illegal immigrants, you don't like the system as it is. And you shouldn't. We have a policy but we don't enforce it. That means we really have no immigration policy. And that is unacceptable.

In an age of terrorism, we must control our borders: Have you been on an international airplane flight since 9/11? Your passport and your luggage will be checked numerous times. The whole thing is very controlled whether you are a citizen or not. So why would we go to all that trouble with airplanes and then let people cross hundreds of miles of border without any inspection or consequence? A sovereign nation today must control who comes in, why they are here and for how long. We must do so at airports and ports and borders. We should vigorously enforce our immigration policies both at the border and within our borders. Both our physical

security and our economic security depend on it.

More legal immigration is necessary: Part of our problem today is that we do not allow legal immigration that is anywhere near the demand or the amount we can absorb. For example, this year's allocation of H1B visas, which is for skilled hi-tech workers, was completely used up by early February - the entire year done in less than 2 months. Fixing our broken system will allow us to simultaneously reduce the demand for illegal immigration while permitting more legal immigration. And this legal immigration can come with strings like a limited time here or employer-provided health insurance to reduce strain on public services.

If we don't enforce our laws, they won't work: Any temporary work visa is by nature a restricted form of immigration. You are restricted as to how long you can be here and what you can do while here. Those restrictions are meaningless if you can't or don't enforce them. For example, it is estimated that more than a third of those here illegally came here on visas but never left when they expired. To create a restricted work program without fixing enforcement will simply invite more illegal immigration over the next few years.

We must deal with the illegal immigrants already here: It is not possible to send buses to round them all up and send them home. It is also not right to give them citizenship or amnesty, disguised or otherwise. So, we have to do something in between. If we implement an improved enforcement process it will force them all to come forward over time. Some will go home on their own. We will need to catch and send others home. Those who want to continue working here will need to go home, reapply and come here the right way. There really are not many other options that make sense. What we can't do is let those who have broken the law to be here get ahead of those who have patiently followed our laws and are waiting for their opportunity to come here and work.

There are obviously lots of details that need to be filled in to create a workable solution. In December, the House passed a bill that is a good first step along that path. It creates a system where employers have to check the legal status of employees; it makes significant improvements to control the entire border; it improves our ability to enforce immigration law.

If reasonable people can agree on the basic tenets that we should enforce our borders and permit new enforceable legal immigration, then we can move beyond rhetoric into a solution. The House bill is the cornerstone of a real solution, but more work will still need to be done. Let's do it.